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From: Shore, Berry
Sent: Mon 1/9/2017 1:51:30 PM
Subject: Early Morning Clips

Cuomo Is Expected to Confirm Deal to Close Indian Point Nuclear Plant

By PATRICK McGEEHAN

JAN. 9, 2017

NY Times

Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo of New York is expected to confirm on Monday that the state has reached an agreement to shut down the Indian Point nuclear power plant, which sits less than 30 miles north of New York City, by April 2021, state officials said.

Mr. Cuomo will claim the long-sought shutdown as a victory in the State of the State speeches he is scheduled to deliver in the city and other locations this week, they said. He has argued for more than 15 years that it is unsafe for nuclear reactors to operate on the edge of the most-populous metropolitan area in the country.

Along with the governor's office, the office of the state attorney general, Eric T. Schneiderman, and Riverkeeper, a nonprofit environmental group, participated in the deal.

The plant has been the target of protests by local residents and environmental groups, but its supporters have argued that there are no adequate substitutes for its high output of low-cost, carbon-free power. Indian Point's two reactors can produce more than 2,000 megawatts, or about one-fourth of the electricity consumed in the city and in Westchester County.

"For 15 years, I have been deeply concerned by the continuing safety violations at Indian Point, especially given its location in the largest and most densely populated metropolitan region in the country," Mr. Cuomo said in a prepared statement. "I am proud to have secured this agreement with Entergy to responsibly close the facility," which could have remained opened for another 14 years.

Entergy, the New Orleans-based utility company that operates Indian Point, has declined to comment on the proposed agreement since Friday, when it was first reported by The New York Times.

Entergy has sought renewal of its federal licenses to operate the reactors for almost a decade. It was unclear why the company would abandon its fight to keep running a plant as profitable as Indian Point without receiving any compensation from the state. But officials said the state would not take on any obligations or liability in the agreement.

Mr. Cuomo, a Democrat, will argue that more than enough other sources of energy will be available by 2021, including hydropower from Quebec carried by new transmission lines, state officials said. He also will say that the effect on electric ratepayers will be negligible.

A state official said the governor's office estimated that, at most, the proposed shutdown would add \$3 a month to electric bills in the metropolitan area. Utility customers in New York City already pay rates that are higher than anywhere in the country, except Hawaii.

"We don't want this to turn into harder impacts on those who are already socially vulnerable," said Robert Freudenberg, the director of energy and environmental programs for the Regional Plan Association.

Mr. Freudenberg wondered how the proposed shutdown would fit with Mr. Cuomo's ambitious goal of having half of the power consumed in the state produced from renewable sources, such as wind and solar power, by 2030.

"There is no carbon-free source of energy currently in the pipeline to take its place," he said, referring to Indian Point. "We feel that now the most urgent priority is that the state take all the steps necessary to ramp up the state's renewable energy supply."

The agreement would involve the state's withdrawal of its challenges to Entergy's license renewals and permits that it needs from state agencies, officials said.

State officials said they had a contractual agreement with Entergy that it would shut down one of the reactors by April 2020 and the other by April 2021. The only exception to meeting those deadlines would come in the event of an unforeseen, catastrophic event, they said.

Local and county officials in Westchester complained that they had been excluded from talks between the state and Entergy, and they expressed concerns about the impending loss of jobs and tax revenue in their communities. The plant employs nearly 1,000 full-time workers, about 550 of whom are union members.

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A state official said there would be time to adjust to those losses. He said Entergy estimated that its work force would shrink by about 20 percent, or about 200 jobs, in 2021. After the shutdowns, about 190 workers would stay on for the decommissioning process, he said.

Officials said the state would inspect the plant annually, including examinations of bolts in the reactors during periodic refueling, until it closed. They said Entergy had agreed to transfer used fuel to protective storage in dry casks, the preferred method of storing spent reactor fuel.

Rehab planned for spans that carry oil trains over creek

by Scott Fallon

Jan. 6, 2017

NJ.com

Environmentalists question whether the CSX bridges connecting Ridgefield Park and Ridgefield are structurally sound.

Two rail bridges that cross Overpeck Creek and carry trains hauling millions of gallons of volatile crude oil will be rehabilitated, a spokesman for their owner said.

Environmentalists have questioned whether the bridges connecting Ridgefield Park to Ridgefield are structurally sound enough to support trains carrying 100 or more tank cars filled with volatile Bakken crude. They have planned a demonstration for Sunday.

A spokesman for CSX, the bridges' owner and the largest rail network in the eastern U.S., said Thursday that the spans were last inspected in August and were found to be in "suitable condition for railroad operations." Rob Doolittle, the spokesman, did not elaborate. Inspections of rail bridges are not public documents and the rail industry has lobbied to keep them private despite efforts in Trenton and Washington.

But CSX is looking at refurbishing the spans. "CSX has begun the planning process to make investments in those bridges to extend their service lives and ensure their suitability for operations further into the future," Doolittle said. "The details of those plans have not been finalized."

ENVIRONMENT: Revived bill would impose new rules on rail companies transporting crude oil through N.J.

Paula Rogovin, a founder of the Coalition to Ban Unsafe Oil Trains, a Bergen County-based advocacy group, said if the bridges need to be repaired, they should not be hauling such a dangerous material over them. "The tank cars are already substandard and now we have bridges that need to be refurbished," she said. "Our position remains the same. There shouldn't be oil trains going on these bridges."

The bridges are a key link in delivering Bakken crude from Albany, N.Y., to a Philadelphia refinery.

The oil comes from North Dakota's Bakken region and is shipped by rail through New Jersey to a refinery in Philadelphia. The trains travel within feet of thousands of homes, businesses and schools in Northvale, Norwood, Harrington Park, Closter, Haworth, Dumont, Bergenfield, Teaneck, Bogota, Ridgefield Park and Ridgefield.

Bakken crude has been involved in several fiery derailments in North America, including one in Canada four years ago that killed 47 people.

Although the number of oil trains have declined recently, their presence in North Jersey over the past several years have prompted local officials to question the integrity of some rail bridges.

That included an 86-year-old CSX bridge over the Oradell Reservoir, a source of drinking water for 800,000 people. CSX replaced the deteriorated wooden deck of that bridge in 2015.

The amount of crude oil shipped by rail plummeted last year.

Only 12,171 barrels were shipped by rail in the U.S. in October compared with 25,923 barrels in October 2015 and 35,255 in October 2014, according to the latest data from the U.S. Energy Information Administration.

The number of trains hauling Bakken crude each week from New York into New Jersey on the CSX River Line is five to 15 down from 15 to 30 trains over the past few years, CSX said last year. Most trains can carry about 3 million gallons of crude.

The CSX bridges are just to the east of a century-old New York, Susquehanna and Western Railway bridge that was slated to be replaced by New Jersey officials. Plans were held up after funding for major transportation projects were frozen over the summer. A state Department of Transportation spokesman did not return a request for an update on the project.

Activists say bridge could soon cause crude oil spill

By Nicholas Katzban

Published 6:50 p.m. ET Jan. 8, 2017 | Updated 50 minutes ago

NJ.com

RIDGEFIELD PARK – A group of about 40 activists braved below-freezing temperatures Sunday to urge Gov. Chris Christie and the CSX Transportation Co. to rehabilitate two bridges crossing Overpeck Creek, near the Hackensack River, which they say could cause a huge oil spill or explosion if not repaired soon.

The rally was coordinated by Paula Rogovin of the Coalition to Ban Unsafe Oil Trains, a Bergen County-based advocacy group. She and other activists contend that the two bridges serve rail lines that transport a volatile form of oil, Bakken crude, with each train carrying up to hundreds of thousands of gallons at a time from Albany to Philadelphia.

“What Bakken crude oil does, it explodes at a very low temperature,” Rogovin said in a speech to other demonstrators. “It’s dangerous stuff, and we have two dangerous bridges.”

Rob Doolittle, a spokesman for CSX, which owns one of the two bridges, said Thursday that the spans were last inspected in August and were found to be in “suitable condition for railroad operations,” but did not elaborate.

“When you get your car inspected, the thickness of a penny can pass inspection,” said Rob Gillies, vice president of Hackensack Riverkeeper’s board of trustees. “So, what do you want? Do you want something that can just pass inspection?”

Rogovin was hardly relieved by a promise from CSX that it would fix the bridge. “It means nothing,” Rogovin said. “They don’t tell us when.” The rail industry has successfully lobbied to keep inspection reports private, she said, adding, “These accidents happen regularly, and we can’t wait.”

Many of the speeches and signs at Sunday’s rally cited a 2013 train derailment in Lac-Mégantic, Quebec, which caused an explosion that destroyed much of the downtown, according to news reports.

Co-founder of the Coalition to Ban Unsafe Oil Trains Paula Rogovin leads a rally by Overpeck Creek in Ridgefield Park on Jan. 8, 2016 asking Governor Chris Christie to repair the bridge going over the creek. Activists say trains carrying volatile Bakken crude oil and other hazardous materials use the bridge which is a century old and needs to be serviced. (Photo: Bernadette Marciniak/NorthJersey.com)

“What happened in Quebec three years ago could happen here,” said Jeff Tittel, director of the New Jersey Sierra Club. “Transportation policy shouldn’t be hoping that an accident doesn’t happen.”

The area near the Overpeck Bridge boasts a population far denser than those of other rail crashes, and could prove more deadly than the one in Lac-Mégantic, Tittel said.

“If it happened here, thousands of lives would be at risk,” said Assemblyman Tim Eustace (D-Paramus), who serves as the chairman for the state Environmental Commission.

Eustace said that repairing the bridges would require rerouting trains over an alternate bridge, but that repairs like the one he is advocating should be paid for by the recently approved gas tax.

Money had been allocated to fix at least one of the bridges, but it was diverted shortly before several road and bridge projects were halted by the governor last summer, Eustace and Tittel said.

“Where’s the money, have any of you seen it?” Eustace asked the crowd.

“The Christie administration likes closing bridges so much, here’s one they should close,” Tittel quipped.

Another rally will take place in Newark on Monday, with participants gathering in Military Park at noon then marching to 1 Gateway Plaza, outside the offices of Sens. Cory Booker and Bob Menendez. The march is part of efforts to encourage Democratic lawmakers to resist President-elect Donald Trump’s cabinet appointments, like Rex Tillerson, the chief executive of Exxon-Mobile nominated to become Secretary of State, and to oppose federal and state officials who deny the existence of climate change.

“Right now, we need Senate Democrats to do everything in their power” to block Trump’s nominations, said Matt Smith, a local representative of the Food and Water Watch advocacy group. “What is going to move them to do that, is the massive outcry from people like us.”]

Letter to Editor Stefanik unresponsive on nominee for EPA

PUBLISHED: SUNDAY, JANUARY 8, 2017 AT 12:30 AM

Watertown Times

From coursing rivers to high peaks, there is much to see and enjoy in the north country. Considering the ecological gifts we have received just by living here, the least we can do is to instill in our children an appreciation, enjoyment and sense of stewardship concerning the outdoors.

At first glance, U.S. Rep. Elise Stefanik would appear to agree with these sentiments. Her website states, “In the north country, we are fortunate to be surrounded by many ecological treasures. Protecting these gems for future generations is a job I take very seriously.”

Rep. Stefanik made this statement in reference to Plan 2014, which is intended to regulate water levels in the St. Lawrence River so as to preserve access and “prepare for climate change.”

In light of Rep. Stefanik’s supposed support for ecological protections, it is troubling that she has refused to object to the incoming president’s choice of Scott Pruitt to head the EPA, a department whose very mission of environmental protection Mr. Pruitt has vociferously opposed.

In fact, just this May, Mr. Pruitt denied the vast scientific consensus on climate change in an article he co-penned for the National Review. As attorney general of Oklahoma, Pruitt sued the EPA over clean energy initiatives. Not incidentally, the reckless disposal of fracking wastewater in Pruitt’s state has led to environmental chaos, with impacts on drinking water and severe manmade earthquakes.

I tried repeatedly to get a straight answer from Rep. Stefanik concerning the Pruitt appointment. But every time I called

one of her three regional offices, her staffers responded that they were “unaware” of Stefanik’s position on Pruitt. At other times, I was told that someone from Rep. Stefanik’s office would get back to me concerning her position. No one ever called back, leading me to believe that either the congresswoman is uninformed about what is cooking in Washington or she simply does not care all that much about the environment. Perhaps she is so myopic as to believe that the only parts of the environment worth protecting are those she can see from her own backyard when she is occasionally in town.

We in the north country deserve representatives who build upon ecological gains rather than undermine them. We need representatives unafraid to take positions that protect the environment, regardless of their party line. And we need representatives who have the guts to call us back

Benjamin Landry

Canton

Residents file suit against hotel developer, state officials

By Dan Reiner

Updated 4:04 p.m. ET Jan. 6, 2017

LowHud.com

TUCKAHOE - While preparatory work is underway on the controversial hotel and restaurant planned at the contaminated former dump on Marbledale Road, village residents are gearing up for a court battle to halt the project.

Nine residents are suing multiple agencies, including the village planning board, the state Department of Environmental Conservation, and the state Health Department, to have two sets of decisions permitting development at the site overturned. The planning board voted 3-2 to approve the plan at an Oct. 19 meeting.

John Rabijs, one of the plaintiffs and a member of the Marbledale Road Coalition, said the goal of the lawsuit is to delay remediation and construction until more environmental testing is done.

APPROVAL: Tuckahoe approves controversial hotel development on Marbledale Road

HOTEL TAX: Cuomo approves 8 new Westchester hotel taxes, including Tuckahoe

TREND: Lots of new hotels going up. Here's where, why

"If we didn't make any noise, they would've started construction in September," Rabijs said. "All we want is for them to thoroughly understand and characterize what's on the site."

The lawsuit, known as an Article 78 proceeding, looks to stymie the proposed five-story, 163-room Marriott SpringHill Suites hotel and detached restaurant, saying development could release toxic gases into the air or groundwater around the 3.45-acre site. The vacant site on Marbledale Road was a marble quarry until the 1950s and later used as a landfill for more than 20 years.

Village Administrator David Burke said developer Bilwin Development Affiliates, LLC was cleared in late December to begin non-intrusive site clearing at the site, which included cutting trees and disposing of brush and leaves. He said Bilwin applied for a stormwater pollution prevention plan, which would permit preliminary digging, and work could begin as early as next week.

Burke said Bilwin will not have a permit to do any intrusive remediation until work scopes, or reports required by the Planning Board, are submitted. He added that the board held a "kick-off" meeting that included Bilwin, the DEC, Tuckahoe police and fire departments and village environmental consultant Mike Musso to lay out future plans.

“They need to provide to the village very, very detailed information for how they’re going to do things,” Burke said.

Rachel Zolottev, head of the Marbledale Road Coalition and whose husband is one of the plaintiffs, said Bilwin began remedial digging at the site in late December despite the village's requirements.

"The planning board repeatedly abandoned its responsibility to review these issues and came up with illegal and unprecedented ways to delegate the responsibility to other agencies," said David Gordon, an attorney representing the plaintiffs. "Nobody knew site work would begin, so it created an uproar. You have a developer that does what it wants and you have agencies that are asleep at the switch."

Burke declined comment about the lawsuit. A representative for Bilwin could not be reached.

Zolottev said the coalition will continue to fight for further monitoring and testing at the site.

"Pretending that the dump site isn't dangerous by not adequately testing or monitoring it does not make it safe," she said in an email. "To disturb this site without acknowledging the risks is a travesty."

Twitter: @reinerwire

Indian Point closing anticipated

01/06/2017

Democrat and Chronicle

"Until it's done, it's not done. Close only counts for horseshoes, not for nuclear plants."

- Rich Azzopardi, spokesman for Gov. Cuomo

ALBANY - The controversial Indian Point nuclear power plant would close by 2021 under a pending agreement between plant owner Entergy Corp. and the state.

Gov. Andrew Cuomo's office on Friday suggested a deal is near to shut down the massive nuclear plant in Buchanan, Westchester County, which the governor and environmental activists have long sought to close, citing its location in the densely populated New York City suburbs.

The agreement - which is awaiting signatures from Cuomo's administration - calls for one of Indian Point's reactors to shut down by April 2020, with the second to follow a year later, according to a source with direct knowledge of the deal.

Rich Azzopardi, a spokesman for Cuomo, issued a statement Friday saying there "is no agreement," but hinted that one may be in the works.

"Governor Cuomo has been working on a possible agreement for 15 years and until it's done, it's not done," Cuomo spokesman Rich Azzopardi said. "Close only counts for horseshoes, not for nuclear plants."

Entergy, a New Orleans-based company, declined comment through a spokesman.

The New York Times, which first reported details of the agreement Friday, said the agreement could be unveiled publicly as soon as Monday.

Indian Point's closure would represent a dramatic change for energy production downstate and could force regulators and power producers to scramble to pick up the slack.

The plant, which first opened in the 1970s and employs about 1,000 workers, has a capacity of up to 2,000 megawatts - about 25 percent of the electricity used in New York City and Westchester, according to Entergy.

Any closure could also have significant local tax impacts in Westchester.

Entergy has "payment in lieu of taxes" deals with Buchanan, the Hendrick Hudson school district, the city of Peekskill and

Westchester County that were expected to amount to about \$31 million in revenue for those government entities in 2015 and rise annually along with the state property tax cap.

Buchanan alone was set to receive about \$2.6 million a year under a 10-year PILOT agreement, along with an annual \$250,000 payment toward water and sewer system maintenance. The Hendrick Hudson PILOT represented nearly one-third of the district's budget in that same year.

Entergy had been seeking a renewal of its expired federal licenses to operate Indian Point's two nuclear reactors, which Cuomo's administration and state Attorney General Eric Schneiderman had opposed.

The company would likely need a short-term renewal of the licenses, which expired in 2013 and 2015, approved by the federal Nuclear Regulatory Commission in order to remain open into 2021.

The pending agreement includes various state agencies and entities, Entergy, Westchester-based conservation group Riverkeeper and Schneiderman's office, which had filed several challenges to Indian Point with federal nuclear regulators.

The deal would see the state and Riverkeeper drop various safety claims and challenges against Entergy in exchange for the shutdown, according to the source with knowledge of the agreement. The state would drop its opposition to a renewal of Indian Point's licenses, as well.

Representatives for Riverkeeper did not immediately return requests for comment Friday.

The closure date for the reactors could be pushed back to 2024 and 2025 if both the state and Entergy agree, according to the Times.

In a statement Friday, Schneiderman all but confirmed the agreement, saying his office "has been fighting to address the serious risks posed by Indian Point."

"If we can shut down Indian Point under an agreement that enhances public safety and kick-starts investment into safer and more reliable renewable energy sources, that will be a major victory for the millions of New Yorkers who live in the region," he said.

The Times said Entergy would have to set up an emergency operations center in Fishkill, Dutchess County, and create a \$15 million fund for environmental protection.

Cuomo, a resident of New Castle, Westchester County, has long opposed the plant and expressed concern over the potential for an accident, citing the plant's densely populated location and proximity to New York City.

At the same time, Cuomo's administration has supported a ratepayer-backed bailout for three upstate nuclear power plants, pointing to the need to keep their emission-free power on the grid in order to reach the state's pollution-cutting goals.

Alex Beauchamp, regional director for the Food & Water Watch, suggested the policy is creating a double standard.

"Governor Cuomo is absolutely right that the dangerous Indian Point nuclear plant poses a grave threat to New Yorkers and must be shut down," he said in a statement.

"Amazingly, though, the governor is simultaneously pursuing a plan to waste billions of dollars on a corporate bailout to keep aging, unprofitable nuclear plants open upstate."

The news of Indian Point's potential closure comes days before Cuomo is scheduled to deliver six regional State of the State messages, including Tuesday at SUNY Purchase in Westchester.

It also comes weeks after the state Court of Appeals dealt Entergy a setback in its bid for a new license, interpreting state coastal water rules in a way that gave Cuomo's administration more authority over whether the plant could operate on the Hudson River.

In the hours following the court decision, Entergy had sounded a positive tone and said it would continue to seek new licenses.

"Notwithstanding today's court decision, we continue to believe we will ultimately be successful in obtaining a (Coastal Zone Management) permit and re-licensing Indian Point," company spokesman Jerry Nappi said in late November.

Includes reporting by The Journal News / lohud.com.

"Until it's done, it's not done. Close only counts for horseshoes, not for nuclear plants."

- Rich Azzopardi

spokesman for Gov. Cuomo

EPA: 540 Tons Of Metals Entered River In Colo. Mine Spill

By MATTHEW DALY, via AP

Published: January 06, 2017

NewsDay

WASHINGTON (AP) Nearly 540 tons of metals mostly iron and aluminum contaminated Colorado's Animas River over nine hours during a massive wastewater spill from an abandoned gold mine in 2015.

That's according to the Environmental Protection Agency, which released a report Friday on metals released into the environment during the August 2015 spill. The report says the total amount of metals entering the river was comparable to levels during one or two days of high spring runoff.

The EPA says its research supports earlier statements that water quality in the affected river system has returned to pre-spill levels.

An EPA-led contractor inadvertently triggered the 3-million-gallon spill while doing preliminary cleanup work at the old Gold King Mine. The blowout turned rivers in Colorado, New Mexico and Utah a sickly yellow.

London breaches annual air pollution limits in first week of 2017: Activist: Pedestrians should have been warned

By SIMON CULLEN AND ELIZABETH ROBERTS , CNN

Updated 01/06 2017 02:17PM

INFORM NY

London breached its annual air pollution limits five days into the new year, Mayor Sadiq Khan said Friday.

An air monitoring site at Brixton Road in south London began recording levels of nitrogen dioxide above the threshold early Thursday and continued to do so beyond the 18-hour legal limit, according to data from King's College London.

Nitrogen dioxide is a gas emitted by diesel engines that causes lung disease and respiratory problems.

Pedestrians should have been warned, activist says

An environmental activist said an "incredible" level of pollution was detected on Brixton Road -- a busy shopping and transport hub -- and that bus services should have been suspended and pedestrians warned to leave the area.

European Union law stipulates that a maximum nitrogen dioxide concentration of 200 micrograms per cubic meter must not be exceeded for more than 18 hours over the year.

The Brixton Road site measured its 19th hour above the threshold at 9 p.m. Thursday.

Simon Birkett, founder and director of the Clean Air in London campaign, said in a statement: "Hourly nitrogen dioxide concentrations reached an incredible 347.7 micrograms per cubic (meter) in Brixton Road at 9 p.m.

"When conditions are as bad as they were on Thursday, bus services should be suspended, drivers should be advised not to drive and pedestrians should be warned to avoid the area."

However, Gary Fuller of King's College said the reading was "high but not that incredible." He told CNN: "In 2016 we measured nine hours above 400 micrograms per cubic meter alongside London's roads."

Health concerns among residents

"There is huge concern here. People are becoming increasingly aware that air pollution is a problem," said Caroline Russell, a Green Party spokeswoman on transportation and a member of the London Assembly.

"One woman I spoke to this morning has a son with asthma, and she explained how completely debilitating it is for him," Russell told CNN during a visit Friday to Brixton.

"He went for a walk around the block, got wheezy, and had a serious asthma attack triggered by this polluted air."

Last year, the annual air pollution limit was breached eight days in to 2016 -- on Putney High Street in southwest London, according to London Air, a monitoring network run by King's College.

Most main roads in London breach legal limits

The network said pollution levels had generally improved since the EU limits were introduced in 2010, but the majority of main roads in London still regularly breach legal values for nitrogen dioxide.

The mayor announced plans Friday for 10 low emission bus zones deploying the "greenest" buses on the capital's most polluted routes to cut nitrogen oxide emissions.

"London's toxic air is a national embarrassment, which damages more than its reputation as a modern global city," said Alan Andrews, a Brixton resident who is a lawyer for the activist group ClientEarth.

"Mayor Sadiq Khan has put forward some welcome proposals to tackle the problem, including introducing a bigger ultra-low emission zone in 2019 and plans to use the cleanest buses on the most polluted roads. It's essential he delivers on these plans and that the national government fully supports him."

But Ian Colbeck, a professor of environmental science at the University of Essex, said trucks and buses are not the only problem.

He pointed to a report issued this week by the International Council on Clean Transportation showing that emissions of nitrogen oxide from new diesel cars -- which converts into nitrogen dioxide once it comes into the air -- were more than double those from trucks and buses and more than six times the legal limit.

Choked by smog, Beijing creates new environmental police

By NOMAAN MERCHANT Associated Press

Jan 8, 2017

Seneca Times

Photo: A woman wears a mask as she walks past a construction site as smog continues to choke Beijing on Friday, Jan. 6, 2017. The official Xinhua News Agency reported this week that the environmental ministry had given out punishments after finding that more than 500 construction sites and enterprises, including metallurgy, agricultural chemical and steel plants, and 10,000 vehicles had breached pollution response plans. (AP Photo/Ng Han Guan)

Photo: Chinese men wearing masks to filter the pollution walk on a bridge near building shrouded by fog and pollution in Beijing, Thursday, Jan. 5, 2017. China has long faced some of the worst air pollution in the world, blamed on its reliance of coal for energy and factory production, as well as a surplus of older, less efficient cars on its roads. Inadequate controls on industry and lax enforcement of standards have worsened the pollution problem. (AP Photo/Andy Wong)

BEIJING (AP) — Officials in Beijing have announced a new environmental police squad to root out illegal burning, the latest government response to the widespread public anger over China's persistent problems with smog.

Beijing's acting mayor, Cai Qi, said at a meeting Saturday that the force would target open-air barbecues, garbage incineration and the burning of wood and other biomass, according to the state-run Xinhua News Agency.

Cai announced several other measures Saturday, including a target of cutting the use of coal by 30 percent in 2017 to shutting down 500 higher-polluting factories and upgrading 2,500 more. About 300,000 high-pollution vehicles will also be restricted from entering the city starting next month, he said.

Beijing and dozens of cities in China spend many winter days under a thick, gray haze, with air pollution levels that routinely exceed World Health Organization guidelines. Beijing spent part of last week under an "orange alert," the second-highest level in China's four-tiered air alert system. More than 20 cities were on the highest "red alert."

Smog is an acutely felt issue in China's cities, where a "red alert" can lead to the closure of schools and businesses, flight cancellations, and shutdowns of highways to keep cars off the roads. During a red alert in Beijing last month, authorities banned construction crews from spray-painting and even seized the charcoal grills from some restaurants.

But enforcement remains an issue. China's environmental ministry said during last week's red alert that its inspection teams found companies resuming production despite a government ban. Many factories remain under severe pressure to meet production targets regardless of air pollution.

Cai on Saturday blamed polluting activities like burning garbage or wood on "the result of lax supervision and weak law enforcement."

But China's pollution is caused chiefly by its thousands of coal-burning factories and a surplus of older, inefficient vehicles. While it tries to answer the loud public calls to tamp down on pollution, China's Communist government is also grappling with an economic slowdown and the challenge of maintaining growth.

China is also the world's largest producer and consumer of coal, and measures like capping production days or shutting down older coal mines run the risk of driving up energy prices and further slowing the economy.

Chinese Defy Pollution, a Stubborn Visitor

By CHRIS BUCKLEY and ADAM WU

JAN. 6, 2017

NY Times

Photo: Dancing at a park blanketed by severe smog in Fuyang, China, on Tuesday. Credit Chinatopix, via Associated Press

BEIJING — Like ghosts floating in a dim netherworld, the dancers twirled, spun and curtsied in smog so dense that couples a few steps away seemed to be murky apparitions suspended in a gray haze. Filthy air has swamped much of northern China for weeks, but some amateur dancers have stuck to their outdoor ballroom routines.

The specterlike dancers in Fuyang, a city in Anhui Province, this week have become one of the images that capture China's latest winter of smog. A wintertime surge in pollution here is often called an "airpocalypse" in foreign news reports. But as these images suggest, living in this miasma has become for many residents a routine to be endured, even defied with an outdoor fox trot.

Photo: People on scooters and bicycles navigated the thick haze in Fuyang, on Tuesday. Credit An Ming/European Pressphoto Agency

"The scariest thing isn't the smog, it's how we've become numbed and used to it," said one comment about the pictures on a Chinese news website, 163.com. Others shrugged off the bleakness with sardonic humor, as people here often do.

"There's nothing scary," said another comment on the same website. "Breathing fresh smog every day, I feel fortunate to be living in this magical country."

Air pollution is chronic across much of industrialized China, but it worsens in winter, when coal-burning heaters fire up and add to the airborne grunge from factories and power plants. An uptick in heavy industry in 2016 has added to the haze this winter, some experts say. In the cold months, polluted air can accumulate across the region, sloshing from one part to another until strong gusts blow it away — until another pool accumulates. Smog extended from the port city of Tianjin deep into central China on Thursday.

Continue reading the main story

On Tuesday in Fuyang, the air quality there was poor, but not terrible by the hard-bitten standards of many Chinese cities. The level of PM2.5 pollution, the fine particulates that pose the greatest danger to health, reached an average 283 micrograms per cubic meter, and the air was classified “severely polluted.”

But since December, levels across many cities in northern China have gone much higher, even reaching 1,000 micrograms of PM2.5 per cubic meter last month in Shijiazhuang, a city in Hebei Province. The World Health Organization recommends daily exposure of no more than 25 micrograms of PM2.5 per cubic meter.

Many residents have become increasingly sensitive to the health threats from air pollution. Patience with the smog is wearing thin, especially among middle-class residents, who can afford to travel and experience life and breathing outside the dome of haze.

The government has promised to clean up the air, and indeed there have been improvements, especially throughout the summer last year. Yet that progress has made the return of the smog this winter even more jarring. Travelers returning by air to Beijing lately have descended from blue skies onto a Stygian underworld. For those trying to leave, many flights have been delayed or cancelled on the worst days because of the poor visibility.

Planes parked at the Beijing Capital International Airport on Wednesday. Credit Wu Hong/European Pressphoto Agency

What worries many people most is the risk to children and the elderly. This week, a letter in the name of Beijing parents urged the city government to allow schools and parents to buy fresh air equipment for classrooms. Officials said air filters would be installed in some schools as a tryout, though not the bigger equipment the letter called for.

“We really don’t want to wait any longer!” said the letter, which circulated widely on the internet. “The smog won’t wait for us.”

Many people in Beijing and other affected Chinese cities now routinely wear masks — a novelty even a few years ago — although often they use cheap, flimsy cotton covers that do little to ward off PM2.5 particles.

Continue reading the main story

“This winter was the first time I’ve thought about moving away,” said Lu Xin, a manager with an internet firm, breathing through a high-tech mask attached to its own electric air filter. “My 3-year-old boy and my parents cooped up at home every day, never going out. Is that a way to live?”

Correction: January 6, 2017

An earlier version of this article misquoted Lu Xin, a manager with an internet firm. He said, “My 3-year-old boy and my parents” — not “Me, my 3-year-old boy and wife” — “cooped up at home every day, never going out. Is that a way to live?” Also, because of an editing error, a picture caption incorrectly identified when the people on scooters and bicycles were photographed. It was Tuesday, not last week.

Volkswagen Said to Be Near Deal With U.S. in Diesel Case

01/06/2017

New York Times, The

Volkswagen is nearing a deal to pay more than \$2 billion to resolve a federal criminal investigation into its cheating on emissions tests, according to three people briefed on the negotiations.

The company or one of its corporate entities is expected to plead guilty to criminal charges as part of the deal, according to one of the people, although what those charges might be is unclear. The settlement could come as early as next week, barring any last-minute hiccups, those people said.

The German automaker is eager to put the Justice Department investigation behind it before President-elect Donald J. Trump is sworn in on Jan. 20, according to two others familiar with the company's position.

An intensive investigation into the manipulation of diesel emissions tests began more than a year ago, and involves American and German investigators and prosecutors. A resolution of the criminal investigation in the United States would allow Volkswagen to try to move past a scandal that has hobbled its diesel car business.

The criminal case against Volkswagen, and the potential for a guilty plea, have set it apart from other recent auto industry investigations. In settlements with General Motors and Toyota over their handling of safety defects, for example, the companies agreed to pay large fines, but did not plead guilty.

Prosecutors are also mulling criminal charges against Takata, the Japanese manufacturer under criminal investigation for its defective airbags.

It is unclear whether prosecutors would also charge Volkswagen employees, but high-ranking Justice Department officials have forecast the possibility.

"We will follow the facts wherever they go, and we will determine whether to bring criminal charges against any companies or individual wrongdoers," Sally Q. Yates, the United States deputy attorney general, said last year at a news conference.

American prosecutors have also traveled to Germany in recent months to interview Volkswagen executives, according to German prosecutors. In addition, the Justice Department has assured witnesses that they will not be arrested if they travel to the United States for questioning, according to a defense lawyer involved in the case as well as one witness, who spoke only on the condition of anonymity. German suspects cannot be arrested by the United States in their home country, which normally does not extradite its own citizens.

It is not clear if any of the suspects, who include former Volkswagen managers and engineers involved in diesel engine development, have accepted the offer. The offers typically allow witnesses to travel to the United States and back without fear of arrest, but do not include a guarantee they will not be charged in the future.

Volkswagen acknowledged in 2015 that it had fitted 11 million diesel cars worldwide with illegal software that made the vehicles capable of defeating pollution tests. The software enabled the cars to detect when they were being tested for emissions, and turn on pollution-control systems to curb emissions at the cost of engine performance. But those emissions controls were not fully deployed on the road, where cars spewed nitrogen oxide at up to 40 times the levels allowed under the Clean Air Act.

Volkswagen has already agreed to pay up to nearly \$16 billion to resolve civil claims in what has become one of the United States' largest consumer class-action settlements ever, involving half a million cars.

Under the settlement, most car owners have the option of either selling their vehicles back to Volkswagen, or getting them fixed, granted the automaker could propose a fix that satisfied regulators.

The Environmental Protection Agency and California Air Resources Board on Friday approved the first of those fixes, covering about 58,000 newer cars.

The scandal has affected a range of Volkswagen and Audi models, including the Audi A3, Volkswagen Beetle, Golf, Jetta and Passat diesel cars. It was brought to light in September 2015, when the Environmental Protection Agency accused Volkswagen of using software to detect when the cars were undergoing testing.

Along with the American and German investigators and prosecutors, the inquiry into the cheating has involved the law firm Jones Day, which was hired by Volkswagen to conduct an internal investigation.

The expected settlement was reported earlier by The Wall Street Journal.

Progress toward a resolution of the case has been frustrated by differences in German and American law and customs.

German prosecutors do not work out plea deals with suspects as routinely as prosecutors in the United States do. Punishments in the United States also tend to be harsher, and are seen as unacceptable by the German suspects.

One person has been convicted in the United States: James Liang, a former Volkswagen engineer who worked for the company in California.

Mr. Liang pleaded guilty in August to charges that included conspiracy to defraud the federal government and violating the Clean Air Act. He is expected to receive a reduced sentence in return for cooperating with investigators.

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Somerset County: January is National Radon Action Month

by Brad Wadlow

3:00 p.m. ET Jan. 7, 2017

[My CentralJersey.com](#)

The Somerset County Board of Chosen Freeholders, Greater Somerset Public Health Partnership (GSPHP), New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP) and the Regional Chronic Disease/Cancer Coalition (RCDC) of Morris and Somerset counties are partnering to recognize January as Radon Awareness Month.

The Somerset County Board of Chosen Freeholders will present a proclamation at the Tuesday, Jan. 10, freeholders meeting.

An information table will be in the lobby of the county administration building, located at 20 Grove St. in Somerville, throughout January. Visitors to the building are invited to help themselves to the material. County offices will be closed Monday, Jan. 16, for the Martin Luther King Jr. holiday.

“Somerset County is committed to increasing awareness about lung cancer,” said Freeholder Deputy Director Peter S. Palmer, public health and safety liaison, in a news release. “It’s important that residents decrease exposure to radon to reduce the incidence of lung cancer; go for cancer screenings so that problems can be identified at an earlier, less dangerous stage; and understand the dangers of smoking and second-hand smoke.”

Radon is an odorless, tasteless and invisible gas that occurs naturally when uranium and radium break down in the soil and in rock formations. Radon gas moves up through the soil and finds its way into homes through cracks in the foundation and openings around pumps, pipes and drains. Radon occurs in higher concentrations in certain areas of the state, including Morris and Somerset counties.

Radon is the leading cause of lung cancer in nonsmokers and the second leading cause of lung cancer in the United States. Radon is associated with approximately 22,000 lung cancer deaths each year in the United States. According to the RCDC, lung and bronchus cancers are the Number 1 cause of cancer-related fatalities in Morris and Somerset counties.

Smokers and people exposed to second-hand smoke have a greater risk of developing lung cancer if they are also exposed to excess radon. Radon does not cause any immediate symptoms, such as asthma or respiratory problems, so testing for radon is the only way to know if a home has elevated radon levels.

“In an effort to reduce the risk of exposure to radon gas, residents are urged to test their homes,” said Branchburg Township Health Officer and GSPHP President Cinthia Weaver. “Even if your neighbor’s home is not affected by radon gas, it does not mean that your home is in an acceptable range.

“Also if there has been construction in or near your home, it is important to retest,” she said. “If a radon test indicates a radon problem, radon mitigation systems can be installed at a cost similar to other home repairs.”

It is not necessary to test every year for radon. For more information on radon and when you should test, visit www.epa.gov/radon.

To enable Somerset County residents to test their homes, radon kits will be available on a first-come, first-served basis at various health departments throughout Somerset County until supplies are depleted (some restrictions may apply). Residents should contact their local health department or the Somerset County Department of Health for cost, availability and information on radon-testing procedures and mitigation. A listing of health departments in Somerset County can be found at www.co.somerset.nj.us/health. To contact the county health department, call 908-231-7155 or email HealthDept@co.somerset.nj.us.

The RCDC operates under the auspices of the Somerset County Department of Health. The RCDC is made possible by a grant from the New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Services' Office of Cancer Control and Prevention.

For more information on the RCDC, to become a member or learn more about available cancer resources or screening locations, dates, times and eligibility, contact Public Health Consultant Lucille Y-Talbot at 908-203-6077 or email ytalbot@co.somerset.nj.us.

Now you can wear the 'Gowanus' for just \$188

By Kirstan Conley

January 7, 2017 | 4:20pm

NY Post

Last week, the clothing chain Anthropologie debuted a V-neck tunic dress dubbed the "Gowanus" — named after the Brooklyn neighborhood whose canal was slapped with a Superfund status in 2010.

The \$188 frock is designed by UZI NYC, which is manufactured in Sunset Park.

But it was the store, not designer Mari Gustafson who named it.

When she first saw the moniker, "I thought, 'We have designed the Superfund-site dress,'" Gustafson told The Post. "This is for when you dress in your crazy mud boots as you are picking industrial waste out of the Gowanus canal."

Anthropologie, which is owned by the same parent company as Urban Outfitters, kept with a Kings County theme for other items in the UZI NYC spring collection — you can also buy the Park Slope, Ditmas Park and Carroll Gardens dresses. The store did not return a request for comment.

"I thought it was cute that the names they picked were South of Atlantic Avenue. I am a big believer in South Brooklyn," Gustafson, a Bay Ridge resident, said. "North Brooklyn has been sold to European interests. Real Brooklynites can't afford to live there"

To Fight Smog, How About Rooftop Bus Gardens?

By NIDA NAJAR JAN. 6, 2017

NY Times

Indians have long practiced the willfully inexact science — some would call it an art — of jugaad.

It is a Hindi word whose specific meaning is a trucklike vehicle mashed together from whatever is available — scraps of an old bus, perhaps, with some wooden beams and maybe a tractor engine. But broadly, it can refer to any kind of slapdash solution, innovation in the face of scarcity.

Now, that ingenuity is focused on one of the country's most intractable modern problems: Delhi's toxic air.

A dense blanket of smog descends over Delhi each autumn, pushing air pollution readings to nearly unbearable levels. And when an outpost of the University of Chicago in New Delhi held a competition for new ideas to solve the pollution

problem, many of the entries drew on good old jugaad.

Some submissions were questionable, to say the least. One contestant proposed planting gardens on top of buses to create natural mobile air filters. Another resident suggested fitting automobile exhaust pipes with a device that could suck up pollution particles, but failed to explain how the technology would actually work.

Closer to the mark were ideas like vertical gardens, with walls of hydroponic greenery planted in the city's slums to absorb some of the pollution from open-air stoves and car exhaust. That one was a finalist. So was a suggestion to provide insulated kiosks for the guards who keep watch outside the gated houses of the wealthy, so the guards can stop burning garbage all night to keep warm.

In the end, the winners, announced in October, were plans that seemed to be the most sustainable and achievable. They included a machine that converts rice straw into fertilizer, so that farmers around the capital would no longer burn their fields after each harvest.

Another winning idea would capture some of the emissions from diesel generators and turn the soot particles into black ink and paint.

The chosen projects will be put into action this year as small pilot programs, but Anna Agarwal, a senior manager at the university's Energy and Environment Lab, said they could eventually be scaled up.

F.B.I. Arrests Volkswagen Executive on Conspiracy Charges in Emissions Scandal

01/08/2017

New York Times, The

The Federal Bureau of Investigation has arrested a Volkswagen executive who faces charges of conspiracy to defraud the United States, two people with knowledge of the arrest said on Sunday, marking an escalation of the criminal investigation into the automaker's diesel emissions cheating scandal.

Oliver Schmidt, who led Volkswagen's regulatory compliance office in the United States from 2014 to March 2015, was arrested on Saturday by investigators in Florida and is expected to be arraigned on Monday in Detroit, said the two people, a law enforcement official and someone familiar with the case.

Lawyers representing Mr. Schmidt did not respond to requests for comment late Sunday. Officials at the Justice Department also declined to comment, as did an F.B.I. spokesman in Detroit.

In a statement, Jeannine Ginivan, a spokeswoman for Volkswagen, said that the automaker "continues to cooperate with the Department of Justice" but that "it would not be appropriate to comment on any ongoing investigations or to discuss personnel matters."

Lawsuits filed against Volkswagen by the New York and Massachusetts state attorneys general accused Mr. Schmidt of playing an important role in Volkswagen's efforts to conceal its emissions cheating from United States regulators.

Starting in late 2014, Mr. Schmidt and other Volkswagen officials repeatedly cited false technical explanations for the high emissions levels from Volkswagen vehicles, the state attorneys general said. In 2015, Mr. Schmidt acknowledged the existence of a so-called defeat device that allowed Volkswagen cars to cheat emissions tests.

Volkswagen eventually said that it had fitted 11 million diesel cars worldwide with illegal software that made the vehicles capable of defeating pollution tests.

The software enabled the cars to sense when they were being tested for emissions and turn on pollution-control systems to curb emissions at the cost of engine performance. But those controls were not fully deployed on the road, where cars spewed nitrogen oxide at up to 40 times the levels allowed under the Clean Air Act.

James Liang, a former Volkswagen engineer who worked for the company in California, pleaded guilty in September to

charges that included conspiracy to defraud the federal government and violating the Clean Air Act. But Mr. Schmidt's arrest brings the investigation into the executive ranks.

The arrest came as Volkswagen and the Justice Department neared a deal to pay more than \$2 billion to resolve the criminal investigation into the emissions cheating. The company or one of its corporate entities is expected to plead guilty as part of the deal.

The settlement could come as early as next week, barring any last-minute hiccups, according to people with knowledge of the negotiations.

The German automaker has been eager to put the Justice Department investigation behind it before President-elect Donald J. Trump is sworn in on Jan. 20.

American prosecutors had traveled to Germany in recent months to interview Volkswagen executives, according to German prosecutors.

The criminal case against Volkswagen, and the potential guilty plea, set it apart from other recent auto industry investigations. In settlements with General Motors and Toyota over their handling of safety defects, for example, the companies agreed to pay large fines, but did not plead guilty.

Prosecutors are also mulling criminal charges against Takata, the Japanese manufacturer under criminal investigation for its defective airbags.

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Under the settlement, most car owners have the option of either selling their vehicles back to Volkswagen, or getting them fixed, provided the automaker could propose a fix that satisfied regulators.

The scandal has affected many Volkswagen and Audi models, including the Audi A3 and Volkswagen Beetle, Golf, Jetta and Passat diesel cars.

Ben Protesse contributed reporting. Related Articles Volkswagen Expected to Pay Another \$1 Billion in Emissions Scandal Volkswagen Emissions Scandal Inquiry Widens to Top Levels Volkswagen to Cut 23,000 German Jobs in Bid to Lift Profit

Newly formed Seneca Falls environmental committee stresses independent role

By DAVID L. SHAW dshaw@ftimes.com

Jan. 7, 2017

Finger Lakes Times

SENECA FALLS — Members of the newly formed Seneca Falls Environmental Action Committee made it clear at the Jan. 3 Town Board meeting that it is an independent group not sanctioned by the town.

Retired Mynderse Academy music teacher Doug Avery explained the committee's purpose at the board meeting.

“Our message is that we’re watching the board and the town supervisor as closely as we’re watching the landfill,” Avery later wrote in an email to the Times.

Avery said there are close to 20 active participants on the panel. Avery, Jan LaValley, Valerie Sandlas and Brad Jones are forming a steering committee for the larger group.

Supervisor Greg Lazzaro confirmed that the committee is not connected to town government in any capacity.

“They are not an advisory group to the Town Board,” Lazzaro said. “The town has a solid-waste committee and a citizens

advisory group, but they decided to form their own group.”

“The committee has come together over the past several months as the debate regarding the Seneca Meadows Landfill and Local Law 3 intensified,” Avery noted.

Avery told the board and public Tuesday the group wants to make it known that it reaffirms its support for the board’s December passage of Local Law 3, which mandates the landfill’s closure by the end of 2025, and “protects us from the creation of other landfills within our town.”

“Included in that support is the assurance that we will continue to monitor the actions of the Town Board, the town supervisor and Seneca Meadows as we move together toward the day when Seneca Falls is finally landfill-free,” Avery said.

Avery outlines some of the group’s other plans:

- Support for any effort by the Seneca County Board of Supervisors to pass its own protective legislation.
- Pressing the state Department of Environmental Conservation to tailor any Seneca Meadows permit renewal to match the closure date of Dec. 31, 2025.

The landfill’s current state operating permit expires Oct. 10; extensions are normally granted in 10-year increments.

- Campaign to have the DEC issue permit renewals in short increments if it becomes evident that Seneca Meadows cannot find a solution to the odor issue.
- Offer its “voice and energy” to the conversation on how Seneca Falls moves into the post-landfill era. That would include planning for the time when payments to the town from the host-community-benefits agreement cease.

The group said it has members with significant experience regarding fiscal issues.

- Assisting the town with environmental issues not specific to the landfill, such as encouraging greater participation in the town recycling program, volunteering to serve on committees regarding waste management and water and sewer infrastructure, and helping to protect all valuable natural resources.

“If handled correctly, passage of Local Law 3 will mark the beginning of a renaissance in the town of Seneca Falls,” Avery said. “There is tremendous enthusiasm among citizens and businesses thrilled at the prospect of finally being out from under the landfill’s shadow. The Seneca Falls Environmental Action Committee offers, collectively and as individuals, to do anything they can to help support that renewal.”

Going Green Picks Up Steam

01/07/2017

New York Times, The

Sustainable tourism -- bringing global awareness to travel and putting it into action -- is a top priority for the United Nations this year. The organization has designated 2017 as the International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development.

There were nearly 1.2 billion international travelers in 2015, up from 674 million in 2000, according to the United Nations. The latest figure represents nearly one out of seven people in the world and is expected to grow to 1.8 billion people by 2030.

This rapid increase of tourists is exactly why sustainable tourism needs attention now, said Taleb Rifai, the secretary general of the World Tourism Organization, the United Nations agency overseeing the initiative. "The impact of tourism on the world can be negative or positive, and our goal is to see to it that the travel industry is a force for good," he said.

According to the U.N.W.T.O., sustainable tourism has three guiding principles for hotels, tour operators, airlines and cruises (as well as destinations and tourists): environmentally friendly practices like minimizing the use of plastic; protecting natural and cultural heritage (think rain forests and historic sites); and supporting local communities by employing local staff, buying local products and engaging in charity work.

Granted, these aren't novel ideas, but they are ever-evolving. Here is a snapshot of where sustainable travel stands today and what's in store for it in the coming year.

The Mainstreaming of Sustainability

Travel experts say that sustainable travel is still a niche movement. "Some travel companies try to be sustainable, while others ignore the idea, and from the traveler side, demand and awareness is soft," said Randy Durband, the chief executive of the Global Sustainable Tourism Council, a nonprofit accreditation group for sustainable travel based in Washington.

To his point, Booking.com, which describes itself as the world's largest travel hotel booking site with a database of around a million properties, conducted a global survey last March of 10,000 travelers and found only 42 percent of those questioned considered themselves to be sustainable travelers. Sixty-five percent said they hadn't stayed or didn't know if they had stayed in eco-friendly accommodations. In another survey the company conducted last year of about 5,700 hotels, only around 25 percent reported that they had sustainable travel initiatives in place.

Nevertheless, the travel industry and travelers have made significant progress, Costas Christ, the director of sustainability for the luxury travel network Virtuoso, said. "Back in the '60s and '70s, going green and caring about local cultures was thought of as being very granola," he said, "But there is much more familiarity and interest around these topics today."

Cruise Ships Get On Board

Cruise lines have lagged behind hotels and airlines when it comes to sustainable travel, Mr. Durband said, but lately that's changed, with several cruise companies stepping up their efforts.

Royal Caribbean, for example, has a new partnership with the World Wildlife Fund to help with ocean conservation. For starters, the company will reduce the carbon emissions from its ships by using scrubbers, machines that eliminate nearly all of the environmentally harmful sulfur dioxide from a ship's exhaust system.

Also, said Rob Zeiger, a Royal Caribbean spokesman, by the end of 2020, its fleet of 44 ships will use seafood only from fisheries and farms certified as sustainable and won't serve overfished species like swordfish. And most of the ships being built for the line will be powered entirely by natural gas and generate electricity through fuel cells, which produce minimal air pollution.

Smaller cruise companies, too, are getting into sustainability. Peregrine Adventures is introducing 10 carbon-offset itineraries in 2017, and the riverboat brand Uniworld Boutique River Cruise Collection is now working with the social enterprise ME to WE to offer guests the opportunity to volunteer, including one in Rajasthan, India, where they help build a new classroom at a village school.

Airline Incentive: Cost

Airlines are in the midst of a big push to reduce their use of fossil fuels, said Martha Honey, the executive director of the Center for Responsible Travel, or Crest, a Washington-based nonprofit that promotes sustainable travel. "These fuels are harmful to the environment and expensive, and the more airlines use, the more it costs them," she said.

According to the Air Transport Action Group, a nonprofit that represents the air industry, fuel accounted for one-third of operating costs in 2015.

Last October, 191 countries reached a landmark agreement at the International Civil Aviation Organization meeting in Montreal to help aviation achieve carbon neutral growth starting in 2021.

Qantas, Lufthansa, American Airlines and JetBlue are among the carriers making sizable investments in aircraft that burn less fuel and are therefore most cost-efficient. Lufthansa has ordered 116 new Airbus planes that are 15 percent more fuel efficient than comparable models. Five of the planes are already in the sky, according to Christina Semmel, a Lufthansa spokeswoman.

JetBlue made news last year with its purchase of 330,000 million gallons of biofuel -- fuel that is made from organic matter including agricultural products and significantly reduces greenhouse gas emissions. It will start using it in 2019. "Our initial commitment is to use the fuel in New York City-area airports, and we plan to use it in all of our aircraft," Sophia Mendelsohn, JetBlue's head of sustainability, said.

More Hotels Green Up

Efforts by hotels to go green have been fairly modest: reusing towels and sheets and installing low-flow shower heads, for example. But a growing number of properties are making sustainability their main attraction. "When it came to hotels, sustainability was once associated with eco-resorts or African safari camps, where they've been working to protect local wildlife for years," Albert Herrera, the senior vice president of Global Product Partnerships for Virtuoso, said. "But today, it's become the defining element of both trendy urban properties and stylish beach resorts."

More than a dozen such hotels are scheduled to open this year, according to Mr. Herrera, including the February debut of 1 Hotel Brooklyn Bridge in Brooklyn Heights, N.Y., the third location for Barry Sternlicht's sustainably focused brand. The 194-room hotel will incorporate native greenery and reclaimed materials in its decor, including walnut from the Brooklyn Botanic Garden, and offer electric car service from Tesla.

Also new is the Reef by CuisinArt, a beachfront property in Anguilla powered by a solar generation system that saves 1.2 million pounds of carbon dioxide emissions a year and creates potable solar water for guests and the island's residents.

And in Africa, there's a sustainable camp, Bisate Lodge, opening in June that's newsworthy because of its location in Rwanda next to Volcanoes National Park, known for mountain gorillas. The lodge's parent company, Wilderness Safaris, is reforesting more than 66 acres of habitat of the critically endangered gorillas, hiring mostly local employees and selling only locally produced items in its gift shop.

Eco-Friendly Tours Are Increasing

According to Ms. Honey of Crest, "There are a growing number of tour operators today that are committed to running socially and environmentally responsible trips."

Intrepid Travel, for example, now offers more than 1,000 group tours a year that are fully carbon neutral, according to Michael Sadowski, a spokesman -- up from around 900 last year. The company uses local transportation and locally owned accommodations and donates money to carbon offset programs. In 2017, Intrepid will offer 65 new carbon offset tours, including a 15-day trip of Myanmar's cultural highlights.

Luxury tour operators like Remote Lands, Butterfield & Robinson and Abercrombie & Kent are also incorporating sustainability on select trips. Abercrombie & Kent has a new 11-day Iceland itinerary this year, which includes accommodations in an eco-friendly hotel, a tour of Hellisheidi Power Plant, one of the largest geothermal power plants in the world, and a visit to a sustainable geothermal greenhouse.

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